The Truth About Migration
“Can Development Co-operation Provide Solutions”

Between the 4th and 5th of February the European Commission hosted the 6th edition of the forum “Cities and Regions for Development Co-operation.”

Cities and Regions from across the globe are at the heart of sustainable development and there are many lessons and practices that can be shared with peers to address some of the critical issues ranging from poverty and food security to gender equality and climate change.

What is Development Co-operation? Often described as development assistance offered by one region to another, usually developed to a developing one, and is a broad description for international action between two cities or regions that can be about

- Financial Support – traditionally what we recognise as “Aid”
- Capacity Support - human or organisational capacity building, technical support and sharing policy experience.
- Policy Change - of which decentralisation is a major component.

The Forum addressed sustainable urban development through twinning, pairing and matchmaking of Local and Regional Authorities from EU and Partner countries which included Cities and Regions from Africa. The 2-Day event not only initiated discussion and debate on cooperation and development it also highlighted successful partnership initiatives including the Platforma Awards which aims to reward the best town-to-town and region-to-region development projects, promoting decentralised cooperation. The towns of Roeselare (Belgium) and Dogbo (Benin) received the first prize for their joint birth registration programme and after six years, Dogbo has become a reference in the field of civil registration in Benin, a country where more than 40% of births are not registered.

The Mayor of Dogbo, Vincent Codjo Akakpo spoke of the benefits of development co-operation and Cities and Regions across Africa are encouraged to explore the possibilities of such partnerships to drive sustainable development.

Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi Secretary General of the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa lead a delegation from Africa to participate in a number of discussions on topics of interest including that of Migration.

As one of the hot topics between the EU and Africa UCLG Africa hosted a side event “Co-operate Around Migration” to provide a platform to interact and generate insights and recommendations directed to the European institutions on this important issue.

Migration today is discussed as if it were a new phenomenon but this has been going on since the dawn of time from the “incredible human journey” when humans first ventured out of Africa some 60,000 years ago, and here we are talking about it in 2019 as if it were something new.

Building on Local Africa’s Charter of Migration adopted at the Africities Summit UCLG Africa’s flagship event held between 20th – 24th November 2018 in Marrakesh.

The Charter highlights on one hand the need to enforce the rights of migrants in the locality in which they find themselves in, be it Morocco, Congo, Zambia, Kenya or Uganda where they are usually accepted and integrated fully into these communities.

The Mayor of Kitwe – Zambia, Christopher P Kang’ombe stated his committed to the Charter but added that countries that have had open door policies for years and that welcome migrants should be recognised. “What we want to see more from UCLG Africa, the AU and UN is that they need to start recognising countries that have shown commitment”

The Charter on the other hand also draws the attention of National Governments to the fact that it is the right of human beings to come and go that stabilizes migratory flows. Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi uses powerful examples of migratory flows “In France approximately 2,000 migrants flowed into the country and a very similar number of French people move to other parts of the world and it is this freedom of movement that will stabilise flows.”

The side event specifically questioned the place and responsibilities of Local and Regional Authorities in European policies, was a timely opportunity to:

- On one hand, spark an intelligent debate and a sincere dialogue on the deep causes of migration and the need for a holistic, multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder and multilevel approach to ensure that migration is no longer seen as a phenomenon of crisis, misunderstanding and tension, but one of partnerships and cooperation based on the multiple opportunities offered by this phenomenon;

- On the other hand, to check the adhesion around the Charter of the Local Governments of Africa on Migration, adopted at the end of the 8th edition of the Africities Summit of UCLG-Africa, as well as the capacity of the Local Authorities to concretely engage in order to identify to what extent decentralized cooperation is indeed a promising lever, especially at the South /South level, to raise awareness and discuss issues of European migration policy as ways to build a pan-African voice of Local Authorities on the migration.